

Notes by Alexander Graham Bell, from March 26, 1914, to May 28, 1914

AVIATION — Miscellaneous — Copied from “Home Notes,” February to April, 1914. (No. 78. DeLand).

Yesterday (Mar. 25) Douglas McCurdy appeared here having been released from the hospital. He feels rather weak and shakey and has lost several pounds in weight but seems to be alright.

Mrs. Arthur W. McCurdy is also here and staying with us.

Yesterday (Mar. 25) Secretary Walcott called me up by telephone at the Volta Bureau to let me know that Mr. Glenn H. Curtiss was anxious to make a copy of the Langley Aerodrome. Mr. Walcott said that Curtiss could have it made in time to try it on Langley Day; May 6, 1914, and that Curtiss thought the expense would not exceed about two thousand dollars and Sec. Walcott wanted to know whether I would approve of an appropriation of two thousand dollars from Smithsonian funds to aid Curtiss make the experiment.

I told Secretary Walcott that I should like to see the experiment made but doubt the advisability of the Smithsonian funds being used for the purpose. Sec. Walcott said “I was thinking that I might chip in myself personally to the extent of a thousand dollars,” and I replied that I also would be glad to chip in and I thought it would be much better to have the experiment made by outside parties at their own expense than to make the Smithsonian responsible for it. I told Secretary Walcott that that was simply my first impression regarding the proposition and that I would telephone him later about the matter.

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This morning (Mar. 26) Secretary Walcott telephoned me again upon the subject. I expressed the same views but told him that I would back him up in whatever he decided was best to be done. He suggested that he had better telegraph Curtiss to come right on and talk the matter over and I acceded to this.

This is an important matter, and, considering my past relations with Curtiss in the A.E.A. and the probability that I may be associated with Curtiss in some way or other should the patents of the A.E.A. be transferred to his company, it may be well for me to be careful about endorsing the proposition that Smithsonian funds should be expended upon this experiment.

It would undoubtedly be to the interest of Curtiss and the A.E.A. to have it demonstrated that a machine built on the Langley model would fly. It would therefore be to my personal interest as a member of the A.E.A. to have the experiment made. But if I endorse the proposition that the Smithsonian funds should be used for the purpose, might I not lay myself open to the charge that I had taken advantage of my position as a Regent of the Smithsonian Institution, and a member of its executive committee to use Smithsonian funds to further my own interests.

I think that under the circumstances that I had better take the ground that while I would have no objection to the use of the Smithsonian funds for this purpose if the Regents desire it, I should not vote upon the matter.

I propose to write to Secretary Walcott and suggest the propriety of the experiment being made under the auspices of the Aero Club of Washington and at its expense. If the Aero Club chooses to get up a subscription to cover the expenses, I would be glad to contribute personally to the fund. Upon this plan, the Smithsonian would only be called upon to give its moral support without contributing financially to the experiment. AGB.

Copied from pages 283–4 of the Beinn Bhreagh Recorder for April 30, 1914. Volume XV. WASHINGTON ITEMS

(Being extracts from “Home Notes” p. 221 et seq)

Langley's Aerodrome Redivivus

“Home Notes,” p. 221 records some telephone talks with Secretary Langley of the Smithsonian Institution about Langley's man-carrying aerodrome, and on April 1, 1914, Dr. Bell sent the following letter:—

1331 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, D. C., 1914, April 1.

Dr. Charles D. Walcott, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D. C. Dear Secretary Walcott,

I have not yet heard what has been decided upon in relation to Glenn d. Curtiss' proposed attempt to fly a machine built upon the Langley model. I sincerely hope that the attempt will be made with a duplicate, and not with the original machine.

I do not wish to express an opinion upon the propriety of aiding this experiment by an appropriation of Smithsonian funds, as I am, in a measure, associated personally with Mr. Curtiss, as a member of the Aerial Experiment Association.

Yours sincerely, (signed) Alexander Graham Bell. Several conferences on A.E.A patent matters were held between Dr. Bell, Mr. Curtiss, Mr. McCurdy and Mr. Cameron, during the later days of March and early in April.

Copied from page 33 of Home Notes, April to July, 1914. (No. 79). THE LANGLEY MACHINE. 1914 May 4 Monday at Conn. Ave.

Douglass McCurdy is still here but expects to leave tonight for Hammondsport, N. Y.

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Should Curtiss surprise Washington by a visit on May 6 "Langley Day" McCurdy will return with him.

Sec. Walcott allowed Curtiss to take the Langley original man carrying aerodrome to Hammondsport with him to see whether he could make it fly and, if so he was to bring it here on Langley Day, May 6, 1914 and give a public exhibit of it in the air.

I have heard nothing as yet concerning the Hammondsport experiment which was to be made privately without directing public attention to the matter. Secretary Walcott desired that the whole matter be considered as confidential for the present.

Copied from "Home Notes, April to July, 1914." (No. 79) Page 135. THE LANGLEY MACHINE. 1914 May 28 Thursday at Conn. Ave.

The following telegram was received at half past four this afternoon (Thurs. May 28).

Hammondsport, N. Y., 1914 May 28.

Langley aerodrome made short flight this morning on first trial. In addition to myself pilot the machine raised pontoons etc weighing three hundred pounds.

(Signed) G. H. Curtiss.

Telegram

Washington, D. C., 1914 May 28. G. H. Curtiss, Hammondsport, N. Y.

Congratulations on your successful vindication of Langley's drome. This is really the crowning achievement of your career at least so far. My best wishes for your continued success.

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(Signed) Graham Bell.